

Mr. Bill Bingham

C.T.1958

By Carl Whiteley



Every day of the Trades Union Congress, which opens in Bournemouth on Monday, there will be a reserved seat waiting for Mr. Bill Bingham, of Burnett Road, Christchurch. He is to be a special guest of the General Council of the T.U.C.

Mr. Bingham has received this special invitation in recognition of 40 years' active service to the trade union movement. He was recommended as a guest by the Bournemouth Trades Council of which he has been treasurer for the past four years. And if health permits, Bill will be there.

"I regard it as a great honour and I very much appreciate the gesture," said Mr. Bingham.

This will not be the first Trades Union Congress he has attended. About 25 years ago he was a delegate to one held at a northern holiday resort.

Bill is a man of the people, interested mainly in the ordinary people around him.

"In most of my spheres of activity I have come across cases of injustice against the workers and it was because of this that I felt compelled to work for social reformation," said Bill.

"The young people of today don't appreciate the self-sacrifice, loss of money, loss of status too and the victimisation that was encountered in the effort to establish the trade union movement.

"I feel that trade unionism is a necessary part of the fabric of our country. It is far better for employers to deal with organised workers than to have numerous individual complaints and unsteadiness.

JOINT CONSULTATION

"I am a great believer in joint consultation and I feel we would get better results if an employer made sure that his supervisory staff went through a course of industrial relations plus economics and shop stewards were compelled to pass an examination before receiving their credentials."

Mr. Bingham knows and speaks his own mind. He does not agree with nationalisation which he claims to be "state capitalism as applied by the previous and present Governments."

RESIGNED

It was because of this view and the fact that he stuck to his guns that he resigned from the Labour Party about seven years ago. He was responsible for the revival of the Christchurch Labour Party in 1944 and his resignation was accepted with "profound regret."

Nearing retirement from his employment as a senior storekeeper at S.R.D.E., Mr. Bingham is a past president of the local branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and at present a member of the Management Committee. He is a member of the Bournemouth and District Local Employment Committee, the Ministry of Labour Tribunal for the Bournemouth district and was recently appointed to the district's Insurance Advisory Committee.

Mr. Bingham will be remembered for his work on Christchurch Town Council. He was a member of the Jumpers ward for only two years from 1945 until 1947, but during that time he was chairman of the Housing Committee and in recognition of his services his name is perpetuated in "Bingham Road" on the Burton Road housing estate.

"I put up for Council not so much from the political point of view but because I realised that the biggest problem facing the town at that time was housing. I wanted to satisfy myself that Christchurch was fighting this issue 100%.

GREAT HONOUR

"When I was elected chairman of the Housing Committee I regarded it as a great honour. I had a wonderful committee of men and women and without their support I could not have succeeded in putting Christchurch on top in the building of post-war houses for a town of its size. Although defeated when I sought re-election to the Council I have the consolation of the housing achievement."

Mr. Bingham's life has been full of ups and downs, but not without variety and excitement. Third son of the late Malcolm Bingham, an Irishman in the 5th Dragoon Guards, he was born at Plymouth. His full names are William Robert.

While at Plymouth ships and sailors fascinated young Bill and it was not surprising that he decided to go to sea.

At 14 he went to sea in the Merchant service and, in his own words, "was buffeted and cuffed but enjoyed every moment of the life."

In 1912 he signed on in the Royal Navy, becoming a Writer and although he was for a short time on H.M.S. "Agincourt," the biggest battleship afloat at that time, most of his naval service was in light cruisers.

BATTLE OF JUTLAND

Of the 1914-18 war Bill's most vivid recollections are undoubtedly of the Battle of Jutland and he has on more than one occasion given talks on this historic naval action. He was serving on the light cruiser "Fearless" when she was the first British vessel to enter the forts of Heligoland.

In 1918 Mr. Bingham left the Navy but not the sea. This time it was in deep sea trawlers from Grimsby and Hull.

Life as a lower deck hand made him realise that fishermen were not always getting a square deal, so he decided to do something about it. He joined the National Union of British Fishermen and the members, realising his ability as a spokesman, soon elected him branch secretary and then national secretary.

That was in 1922 and it launched Bill on his trade union and political activities.

For the fishermen there were victories and defeats and eventually their union became incorporated in the Transport and General Workers Union. His association with the fishermen ended and he turned his attention more actively to politics.

POLITICAL ORGANISER

He became a political organiser in the north of England and had experience in several types of employment before coming to Bournemouth in 1933 as a commercial traveller and then to Christchurch in 1939 as a semi-skilled fitter at Airspeeds. While there he was editor of the Airspeed Review. At the General Election of 1945 he was sub-agent for Dr. H. M. King, Labour Parliamentary candidate for the New Forest Division.

Mr. Bingham married a Boscombe girl and they have one daughter, 23 year old Elizabeth, a clerical worker at Boscombe.

His hobbies are literature and music, but, he said, "I get a kick out of serving on committees where one can help others."

He has no patience with people who ask him what he is going to do with himself when he retires. "There are so many things that one can do for the benefit of mankind," said Bill.

FOND OF MUSIC

Mr. Bingham is passionately fond of music—"but I can't play a note." He added: If I ever came into some money I would buy the best classical music records and with my pipe of tobacco listen to them all. And when fed up with that I would go back to my books."

But at the moment, Bill is looking forward to the Trades Union Congress.